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Statement submitted by Centre for Research in Rural and Industrial Development, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.

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Statement

Challenges for Women Empowerment: Lack of Public Services and Social Protection Systems

Women empowerment signifies liberation of women from the vicious clutches of social, political, economic and gender-based discrimination. It denotes women having the freedom to take decisions and make life choices.

Various international and national landmark steps have been taken to empower women such as the inclusion of 'Women Empowerment' as one of the prime goals in the eight Millennium Development Goals. Goal three of the Millennium Development Goals unequivocally calls for gender equality and the empowerment of women.

India is the only country where ironically women are worshipped as goddesses and has one of the worst records on treatment of girls and women. Further, India is the only country where Three-Tier system of democracy — three levels of government — has been legally adopted. The third-tier, federalism, is local level governance in the form of Panchayats (Rural level) and Municipalities (Urban level) which was adopted by the enactment of 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment Act. All the local elected bodies reserve one-third of their seats for women which has been recently increased to 50 per cent in 80 per cent of the states in India. Such provisions have been made to increase the effective participation of women in politics.

According to the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report 2017, India ranked 108, closing 67 per cent of its gender gap based on the four pillars that the World Economic Forum measures — education, workplace, health and political representation. Economic participation and health are India's greatest challenges.

There is no argument that women in India have made a considerable progress since independence, however, they continue to struggle against many social evils in the male-dominated, patriarchal society.

The Centre for Research in Rural and Industrial Development (CRRID) has been engaged in analysing women empowerment issues, since its inception, on various parameters like reproductive health, education, employment. It has also been evaluating various government schemes on women empowerment. The results are circulated among government officials and bureaucrats. The Centre for Research in Rural and Industrial Development has also been disseminating the findings by holding seminars, conferences and publishing the studies in Journals or in the form of books. These publications have been widely circulated in India and abroad.

This presentation shares with the stakeholders the findings of some of the surveys, studies, publications of the Centre for Research in Rural and Industrial Development, focusing on the challenges to Women's empowerment, which need to be bridged for sustainable development. The problems are more acute among the vulnerable and marginalized sections i.e. poor, scheduled castes, tribal women. Poor implementation of government schemes, lack of social protection policies and infrastructure adds to women's low status in a patriarchal society like India.

The paper published by Centre for Research in Rural and Industrial Development entitled 'Women Empowerment: Gendered Dynamics in Indian Punjab' analysed the various aspects of empowerment and concluded that high levels of development did not decipher into empowerment of women. Moreover, male domination and rigid socio-cultural environment perpetuates her deprived status. The study suggested female education and constant reconditioning programs on gender equality at the household level to rip off the deep-rooted social beliefs on son preference.

Another study 'Accessibility of Toilets among Scheduled Castes in Rural Punjab: Issues and Challenges' highlighted lack of services and brought out that despite massive programmes on sanitation in the country, access to latrines remains a major challenge in rural areas, especially among the marginalized sections of society. Women and girls were found to be more vulnerable. In spite of 'Swachh Bharat Mission' launched by the Prime Minister of India to achieve the vision of 'Clean India' and universal sanitation coverage, the unhygienic traditional practice of open defecation continues to remain the major option for many females. Scheduled Caste women and girls voiced multiple menaces of open defecation like it being health hazardous, causing inconvenience (especially during night hours, among pregnant women and during rainy season), lack of privacy or security resulting in eve teasing and defecation site being a threat to their lives.

Study entitled 'Home-based work: The status of women hosiery workers in Ludhiana' analyses the women working in the informal sector of economy. The study was carried in Ludhiana city, commonly known as "hub of the Indian Hosiery Industry", where women are engaged in home-based production under the 'putting out' system. Home-based production denies women all benefits of collective action. They suffer from extreme hours of work, low wages, unsteady employment, no paid holidays, no maternity leaves and appalling work surroundings. The employers however enjoy tremendous advantages with partially no legislation defining women's rights. Being in the unorganized sector, women have no social protection and no political power and hence are exploited.

The results of the above-mentioned studies were submitted to the government bodies for necessary action and were also published in reputed journals for wider dissemination.

Study entitled 'Quality of Natal Care Services at Public Health Facilities in Punjab' rated the care received by women like diagnostic facilities (blood, stool and urine) and availability of free medicines from the health facilities as high. Further, availability of beds in the gynaecological ward, continuous supply of electricity and availability of medicines portrayed good quality of services yet cleanliness of toilets, non-availability of water in toilets and no curtains for maintaining privacy of mothers were adversely affecting the quality of services offered by these facilities. There was an acute shortage of specialists in these hospitals. The physical infrastructure like labour room, operation theatre, laboratory and pharmacy was satisfactory, but the use of ultrasound machine and radiographer needed improvement. The study identified the areas for quality improvement in natal care services offered at the public health facilities.

The findings were disseminated to government bodies at state and national level for quick action for filling the gaps.

The Centre for Research in Rural and Industrial Development has a Population Research Centre established by Ministry of Health & Family Welfare, Government of India, working continuously on the evaluation and field assessments of various schemes launched by centre and state government especially related to family welfare and Reproductive health care of women. A few amongst them are: Delivery Care Services in Punjab, Mahila Swasthya Sangh Scheme: An Evaluation, Impact of Janani Suraksha Yojana on Selected Health Behaviour in Punjab, Factors Contributing to Home Deliveries in Punjab.

The Centre for Research in Rural and Industrial Development is thus regularly contributing to the Ministry of Health & Family Welfare by identifying the gaps in the schemes, thereby enhancing their scope of improvement in future health schemes and public infrastructure for women.

Empowering Poor Tribal Girls under Corporate Social Responsibility: A Case Study of Nursing Colleges of SAIL at Bhilai and Rourkela

In order to improve the quality of life of tribal population in the State, the Government of India have introduced various development programmes including respective training institutes of steel plants of SAIL. Most of girls reported that training programme has helped them in raising their skill level, improve their aptitude and help them in job searching techniques. In fact, it is highly compatible with inclusive growth and make in India programme.

Such positive findings were disseminated to the government bodies and industrialists for replication elsewhere.

Access to Employment Sectors or Entrepreneurship among Women of Scheduled Castes (SC) Families in Rural Punjab

The study aimed to find out whether the Scheduled Castes women get opportunities for employment in government sector. The major findings are that Scheduled Castes women earn and contribute in their family income, although majority earn through unorganized work sectors, particularly by doing menial work in higher caste families. There are government schemes providing free education to Scheduled Castes girls' up to higher level of school education, but do not place them in employment sector even after the completion of diploma or degree courses.

The results were disseminated to government bodies at state and national level.

Overall, since the Centre for Research in Rural and Industrial Development usually conducts research on government sponsored projects and collects both secondary and field based empirical data, all studies definitely have a strong connotation in policy planning. The studies by identifying the gaps in the present policies and their implementation contribute in strengthening the rights of women in the future policies being framed.